

Testimony of Bill Long
President, Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District

Hearing on H.R. 317 (Salazar): To authorize the construction of the Arkansas Valley Conduit in the State of Colorado and for other purposes (Arkansas Valley Conduit Act)

Before the Subcommittee on Water and Power
U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources
March 13, 2008

[Madame Chair] My name is Bill Long, president of the Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District (“Southeastern”), and I am testifying today in support of the goals embodied in H.R. 317 (Salazar): To authorize the construction of the Arkansas Valley Conduit in the State of Colorado, and for other purposes (Arkansas Valley Conduit Act). In particular, I would like to address my comments to the need for the Arkansas Valley Conduit. I would like to thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify today. I also thank Representatives Musgrave and Salazar for their leadership in introducing this legislation and the Subcommittee for holding this hearing today.

As background for my testimony, Southeastern is a statutory water conservancy district (*see* C.R.S. § 37-45-101, *et seq.*), which was formed on April 29, 1958, by the District Court for Pueblo County, Colorado. Southeastern’s district boundaries extend along the Arkansas River from Buena Vista to Lamar, and along Fountain Creek from Colorado Springs to Pueblo, Colorado. Southeastern administers, holds all water rights for, and repays reimbursable costs for the Fry-Ark Project, a \$550 million multi-purpose reclamation project authorized by Congress and built by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (“Reclamation”). The Project diverts water underneath the Continental Divide, from the Fryingpan and Roaring Fork River drainages, into the Arkansas River drainage, where

Project water is stored in Pueblo Reservoir and other reservoirs. Southeastern provides Project water and return flows to supplement the decreed water rights of water users within Southeastern's boundaries. Southeastern repays a large part of the Project's construction costs (estimated at \$127 million over a minimum 40-year period), as well as annual operation and maintenance costs, in accordance with its repayment contract with the United States. Payments are made from property tax revenues available to Southeastern, supplemented by revenue from Project water sales.

On August 16, 1962, John F. Kennedy flew to Pueblo, Colorado to officially and proudly proclaim the authorization of the Project, and the start of construction. Both the 1962 Act, and the 1978 Amendment contemplated the construction of the Arkansas Valley Conduit, which has yet to be developed, primarily because the constituents do not have the funding to develop it.

As early as 1953, the Secretary of the Interior acknowledged that additional quantity and better quality of domestic and municipal water was critically needed for the Arkansas Valley, and in particular for those towns and cities east of Pueblo. House Document 187, 83d Congress, 1st Session, and the Fryingpan-Arkansas Final Environmental Statement dated April 16, 1975, both of which have been incorporated by reference into the Authorizing Act, recognized that the Arkansas Valley Conduit would be an effective way to address this need. The local water available from the Arkansas River alluvium has historically been high in Total Dissolved Solids (TDS), sulfates, and calcium, and has objectionable concentrations of iron and manganese.

Representatives of local and county governments, water districts and other interested citizens of the Lower Arkansas River Basin formed a committee in 2000 to

consider a feasibility study of the Arkansas Valley Conduit. These interested parties formed the *WaterWorks!* Committee and, along with Southeastern, began to review the feasibility of developing the Arkansas Valley Conduit. Some of the relevant conclusions reached are as follows:

- The cost of the Arkansas Valley Conduit compares favorably with any “no action alternative,” which would still require the communities involved to make substantial financial investments to address current water quality and safe drinking standards.
- The financial capabilities of the participating agencies are inadequate to fund the construction of the proposed Arkansas Valley Conduit, under a 100 percent funding requirement. Mr. Broderick’s testimony today will cover the funding for the Arkansas Valley Conduit.
- There is an adequate water supply to make the Arkansas Valley Conduit feasible.

As mentioned above, the Arkansas Valley Conduit was included in the original Fry-Ark reports integrated into the Fry-Ark Authorization Act. The Arkansas Valley Conduit was not built because communities in the Lower Arkansas River Basin could not fully fund the Arkansas Valley Conduit project. A study of the Arkansas Valley Conduit was prepared for Southeastern, the Four Corners Regional Commission and the Bureau of Reclamation in 1972. The report’s recommendations for construction of a water treatment plant, pumping station and conduit to serve 16 communities and 25 water associations east of Pueblo were not implemented at that time due to the lack of federal funding. Evaluations on the quantity of water needed to satisfy long-range objectives for

water users in the Southeastern district area were prepared in 1998. Additionally, an update of the estimated construction costs presented in the 1972 report was prepared in 1998.

The citizens and communities of the Lower Arkansas River Basin have waited 30 to 50 years for this project that will improve their water quality and supply. The need for the Arkansas Valley Conduit has been well established for more than 50 years. The Lower Arkansas River Basin communities continue to seek federal assistance in moving this much-needed project forward. We look forward to working with our Congressional delegation and this Subcommittee to bring this much-needed project to fulfillment.